

Functional Health – Senior Screening & Early Detection

A clinical decision-support tool for veterinarians implementing proactive senior care protocols. This framework helps identify early functional decline before disease becomes symptomatic, preserving treatment options and improving long-term outcomes.



Why Age Is the Biggest Risk Factor

Most chronic disease develops **silently over years**, accumulating damage at the cellular and organ level long before clinical signs emerge. By the time symptoms appear, physiological reserve is often significantly diminished.

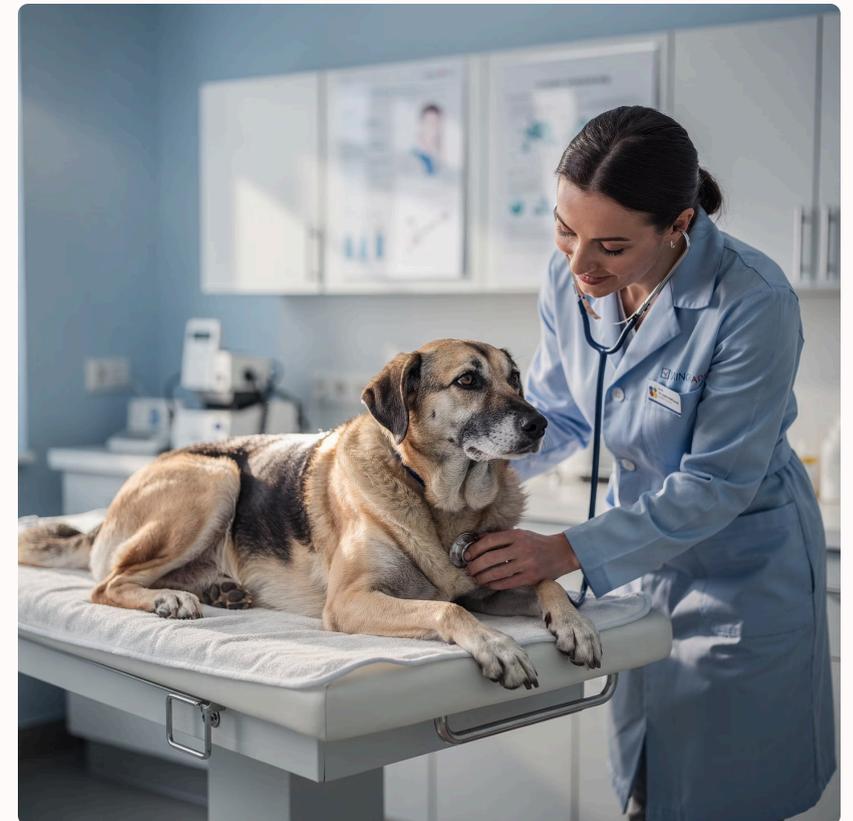
Waiting for clinical symptoms often means:

- Fewer therapeutic options available
- More aggressive treatment protocols required
- Less time to intervene with gentle, preventive measures
- Reduced quality-of-life preservation window

Functional Health shifts the clinical focus to **early detection**, when physiological trends can still be modified and long-term outcomes meaningfully improved through targeted intervention.

Decision-Support Tool

This worksheet provides structured guidance, not definitive diagnosis. Clinical judgment remains essential for individualized patient care.



The 3 Core Goals

This worksheet is designed to support your clinical decision-making through a structured, three-phase approach to senior pet evaluation.



Clarify What Matters Most

Identify the most relevant risk factors and functional concerns for this individual patient at this point in time.



Determine the Next Best Test

Select appropriate diagnostic screening based on age-related risk patterns and current health status.



Choose the Appropriate Next Step

Implement measured, individualized interventions or monitoring protocols based on findings.

Clarify What Matters Most Right Now

Age itself increases disease risk substantially—even when a pet appears outwardly healthy. Physiological aging begins well before clinical disease manifests, making proactive screening essential.

What "Senior" Really Means

- **Dogs:** Approximately 7 years (earlier for large and giant breeds—often 5–6 years due to accelerated aging)
- **Cats:** Approximately 8–9 years

This life stage marks when **functional decline often begins**—subclinical changes in organ function, metabolic efficiency, and cellular repair mechanisms—long before obvious clinical illness emerges.

Functional Health Perspective

The key clinical question is not: "Is my patient sick?"

It is: **"Are there early physiological changes that deserve attention now?"**

Functional Health prioritizes **patterns and trends** over isolated abnormal values, recognizing that subtle shifts often precede disease by months or years.

Determine the Next Best Test

Senior screening is most clinically effective when testing is **purposeful and prioritized**. Functional Health helps identify which diagnostic areas add the most clinical value **first**, avoiding both undertesting and unnecessary comprehensive panels.



Kidney Function

Creatinine, SDMA, urine specific gravity, and UPC ratio for early detection of chronic kidney disease



Heart Health

Auscultation findings, NT-proBNP, and echocardiography when murmurs or risk factors present



Blood Pressure

Systolic blood pressure monitoring to detect hypertension before end-organ damage occurs



Inflammation Markers

CBC with differential, acute phase proteins when chronic inflammatory disease suspected



Dental Disease

Oral examination under sedation, dental radiographs to assess periodontal disease severity

Not every senior pet needs every test at once. The clinical goal is **right test, right time**, guided by individual risk factors, trends over time, and physical examination findings.

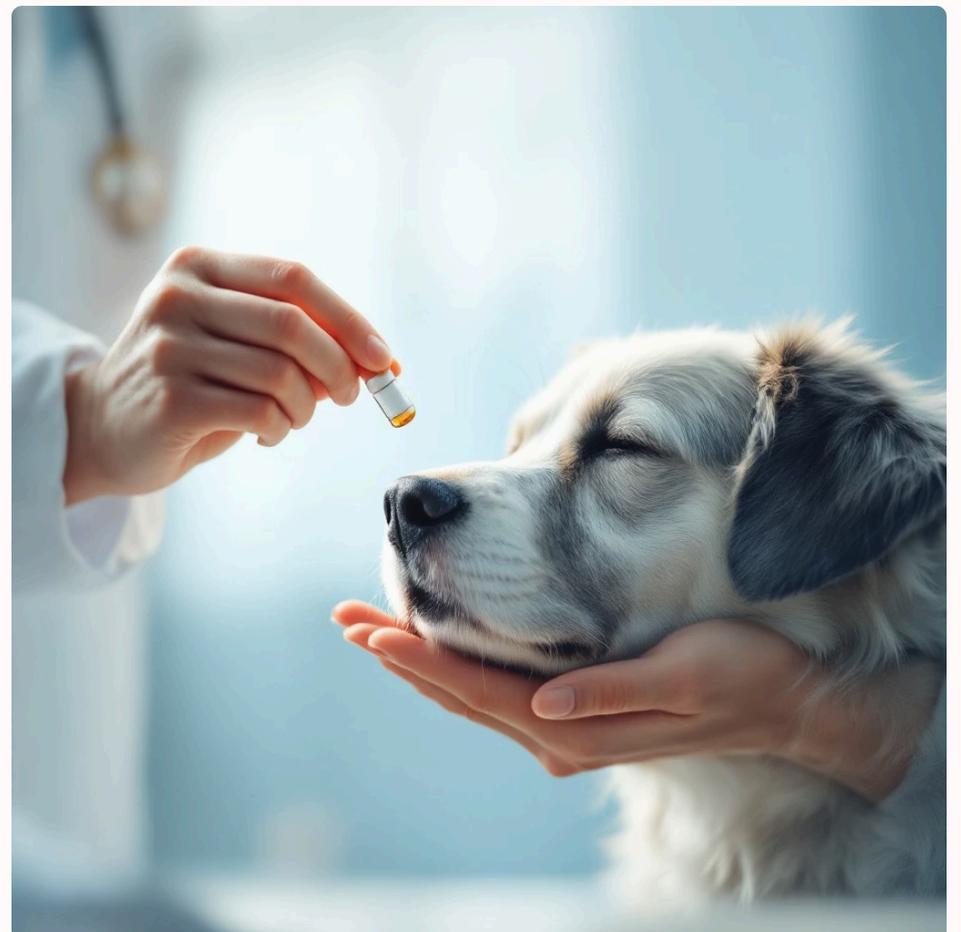
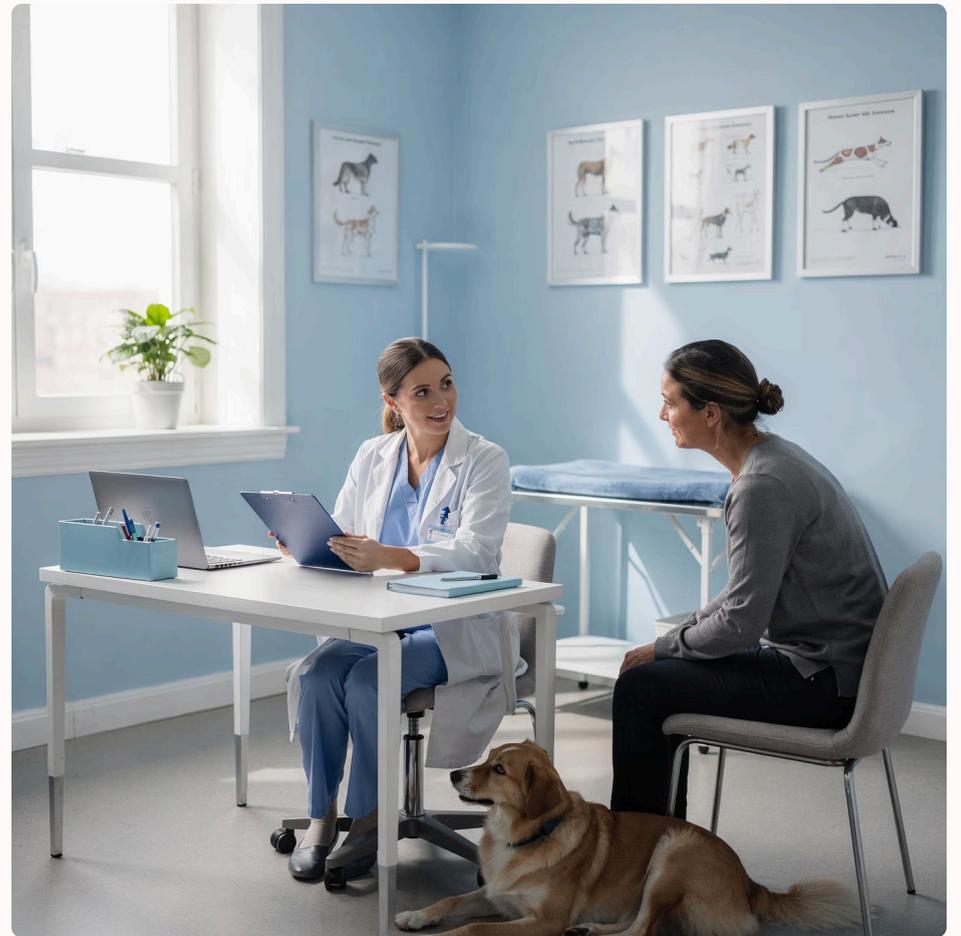
Choose the Most Appropriate Next Step

Once early physiological changes are identified, next steps should be **measured and individualized** to the patient's specific situation. Aggressive intervention is not always indicated—often, strategic monitoring is the most appropriate clinical choice.

Appropriate Next Steps May Include:

- **Continued monitoring** with defined recheck intervals (e.g., 3-month, 6-month follow-up)
- **Targeted lifestyle modifications** including dietary adjustments, weight management, or environmental enrichment
- **Supplement support** when evidence supports benefit (e.g., omega-3 fatty acids, joint supplements)
- **Focused diagnostic follow-up** when trends suggest progression rather than stable subclinical change

Early action often prevents disease escalation and preserves clinical flexibility, allowing less invasive interventions to remain viable options.



When Early Detection Changes Outcomes

Delay Disease Onset

Early intervention can slow progression of chronic conditions like kidney disease, osteoarthritis, and cognitive decline through targeted management before significant organ damage occurs.

Reduce Medication Burden

Early detection often means lower medication doses, fewer drugs needed, and better tolerance with minimal side effects compared to treating advanced disease.

1

2

3

4

Preserve Quality of Life

Detecting subclinical disease allows for gentler interventions—dietary changes, supplements, lifestyle modifications—that maintain comfort and function longer.

Extend Healthy Years

The goal is not just longer life, but more years of vitality, mobility, and engagement—time gained with preserved quality, not merely survival.

📌 **Functional Health is about time gained, not fear created.** This approach empowers proactive care without creating unnecessary anxiety about normal aging.

When to Escalate Beyond the Worksheet

A [PET LONGEVITY CONSULT](#) provides expert guidance when clinical decision-making becomes complex or patterns suggest multi-system involvement.

Abnormalities Cluster Across Systems

When findings span multiple organ systems (e.g., kidney markers plus cardiac changes plus inflammatory indicators), expert interpretation helps prioritize intervention sequence.

Trends Suggest Progression

When serial testing shows worsening values rather than stable subclinical changes, specialized guidance helps determine appropriate escalation timing.

Need Help Prioritizing Tests

When multiple screening options exist but budget or patient stress limits testing, expert input identifies highest-yield diagnostics first.

Decisions Feel Complex or Conflicting

When clinical findings create uncertainty about intervention versus monitoring, or when client goals require nuanced discussion, consultation provides clarity.

Expert guidance helps avoid both **overtesting** (unnecessary diagnostics that add cost without clinical value) and **missed opportunity** (failing to detect actionable changes early enough for meaningful intervention).

Your Next Step

Senior pets benefit most from a **structured, stepwise approach** that builds clinical understanding over time rather than attempting comprehensive evaluation all at once.

01

Establish Baseline

Complete **Functional Health — Foundations** to document current status and identify individual normal ranges

02

Identify Priority Risks

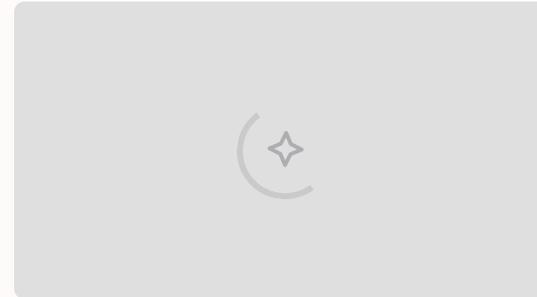
Add **Senior Screening & Early Detection** to focus on age-related changes most relevant to this patient

03

Escalate When Indicated

Seek expert guidance through a Pet Longevity Consult when patterns are unclear or decisions require specialized input

There is no single correct action for every patient—only the **appropriate next step for your patient today**, based on their individual risk profile, current health status, and rate of change over time.



[Start a Pet Longevity Consult](#)

Proactive Care Preserves Options

7+

Years

When dogs enter senior life stage and benefit from proactive screening

8+

Years

When cats typically begin experiencing age-related functional decline

3-6

Months

Recommended recheck interval for monitoring stable subclinical changes

"Early detection is not about finding disease—it's about preserving the window of opportunity for gentle intervention, maintaining quality of life, and giving pets more healthy years with their families."

[Start a Pet Longevity Consult](#) to receive personalized guidance on your senior patient's screening and intervention strategy.

